

VZCZCXRO2068
RR RUEH DU RUEHJO
DE RUEHTN #0212 2970633
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 230633Z OCT 08
FM AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2852
INFO RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 6211
RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 3173
RUEHJO/AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG 2036

UNCLAS CAPE TOWN 000212

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SF](#)
SUBJECT: WESTERN CAPE ANC SPLIT?

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The African National Congress (ANC) is facing its worst political crisis since the end of apartheid 14 years ago. Supporters of former President, Thabo Mbeki, who was deposed last month by the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC), are threatening to break away from the ANC and form a new political party. National newspapers report that meetings of disgruntled ANC members and leaders were held secretly in several provinces, including Gauteng, Limpopo, the Free State, the Eastern and the Western Cape (WC). End summary

¶2. (SBU) Mosiuoa Lekota, a former political prisoner and ANC party chairman who quit as Defense Minister when Mbeki was forced out as president last month, said he and other disillusioned officials planned to canvas for support within the ANC to organize a "national convention." Lekota, who has since been suspended then expelled by the ANC, has been publicly joined by Mluleki George, a former deputy cabinet minister, Sam Shilowa, former Premier of Gauteng Province, and Willie Madisha, former head of the South African Teachers' Union and General Secretary of COSATU, in their proposal to split from the ANC. Groups of dissident ANC members from the Western Cape, the Northern Cape, Eastern Cape (where George operates), parts of the Free State and Limpopo province also announced they wanted to join Lekota.

¶3. (SBU) In recent weeks the Western Cape branch of the ANC has been fraught with problems resulting from factionalism and internal power struggles that intensified to such a degree that two rival ANC provincial conferences were held. Mbulelo Ncedana led representatives from 59 local ANC branches to boycott the provincial conference where pro-Zuma supporter Mcebisi Skwatsha was elected Provincial Chairman. The immediate effect of the boycott was for Skwatsha to announce that the ANC in the Western Cape had suspended five senior regional members for undermining party unity and discipline, among them Ncedana. Mbulelo Ncedana then announced his resignation from the ANC, paving the way for others who have aligned themselves with Lekota's call for a national convention to resign.

¶4. (SBU) On October 17, The Cape Times reported that continued infighting and bitter divisions within the ANC had intensified and led to a further eleven senior Western Cape ANC members resigning. The ANC has tried to downplay any discord within the party. In a recent television interview Jacob Zuma conceded that the ANC is losing leaders of the "previous generation," but this does not mean the ANC's unity is necessarily under severe threat. However, over the weekend the friction intensified when more than a 1000 former ANC supporters gathered in Philippi, Cape Town to attend a rally addressed by Sam Shilowa. Former Gauteng Premier Shilowa told his supporters of the preparations for the formation of a breakaway party. Hundreds of disgruntled ANC supporters then tore up their membership cards to illustrate their dissatisfaction with the party and Jacob Zuma's leadership.

¶5. (SBU) The race for the Western Cape will be heavily contested in the next election. The City of Cape Town is already in the hands of the opposition alliance and the ANC has been struggling to regain its foothold in the province. ANC leaders in the Western Cape have traditionally backed Mbeki and with the current dissent in the ANC there is a very real possibility that the ANC could lose the province in the next election. A study by the University of Cape Town's Centre for Social Science Research has found "diminishing

party loyalties for all parties and the corresponding growth of a
Qparty loyalties for all parties and the corresponding growth of a
'floating' or an independent electorate" in South Africa. The
growing flexibility of voter attitudes highlighted by the research
is good news for ANC rebels planning a new party to fight next
year's elections. The absence of procedures for direct election of
the president, parliamentarians, and provincial premiers and
councils frustrates the potential electoral strength of the emerging
floating group of voters.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The establishment of a new party would certainly
intensify election campaigning in the Western Cape. Despite
opposition parties welcoming a new party, Lekota could possibly harm
the Democratic Alliance (DA) and Independent Democrats (ID) ability
to reach out to a broader black constituency, those who did not want
to vote for the ANC, but did not see either opposition party as a
credible mass-based opposition. Both the DA and ID's growth
prospects going forward could be curtailed with Lekota shaping a
party that defends the Constitution, the rule of law and the
judiciary. The opposition will now have to find a way of taking on
Lekota without alienating potential black voters. PolAssistant has
spoken with a number of DA representatives who all indicated that
the DA is considering forming an alliance with any new party that
Lekota establishes and has, in fact, held secret talks with Lekota
in this regard. End comment.